

**The fishing lifecourse: exploring the importance of social contexts,  
capitals and (more than) fishing identities**

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# **The fishing lifecourse: exploring the importance of social contexts, capitals and (more than) fishing identities**

## **Abstract**

There is an emerging call for social scientists to pay greater attention to the social and cultural contexts of fishing and fishers. A resulting literature is evolving which focuses on individual life experiences, particularly relating to entering the fishing occupation, and what these might mean for the future sustainability of the fishing industry. However, the ways in which these lives are linked and intergenerationally connected remains somewhat of a blindspot. This paper considers the potential of a lifecourse approach to help us better understand how fishers accumulate, utilise and share capital(s) in getting onto and moving along the ‘fishing ladder’. Drawing on in-depth qualitative research with fishing families on the Llŷn peninsula small-scale fishery in north Wales (UK) the paper explores how there are multiple social contexts from which ‘prospective fishers’ can begin their fishing career and which differentially (re)shape how they can accumulate capital over time. Later on in the lifecourse, fishers (re)negotiate their fishing identities in relation to the lives of others, within transitions such as parenthood as well as with older age. The paper’s findings offer a much-needed temporal dimension to our understanding of fishing lives and what it means to be a ‘good fisher’.

*Key words:* The fishing lifecourse; the ‘good fisher’; capital(s); small-scale fishing; fishing community; Bourdieu.

## Introduction

It is widely accepted that small-scale fishing –which is thought to account for 50 of the world’s 51 million fishers (Jentoft 2014) –is central to the future sustainability of the global fishing industry.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, recent research has focused on small-scale fisheries’ resilience, potential decline and how they might be reproduced over time (see Johnsen and Vik 2013; Neis *et al.* 2013; Power *et al.* 2014; Smith *et al.* 2014; White 2015). Within this research, Neis *et al.* (2013) have suggested that conventional fisheries management and policy has tended to be ‘intergenerationally blind’, often ignoring the importance of familial, household and intergenerational relations in shaping the resilience (or otherwise) of small-scale fisheries. In attending to this blindness, and answering the wider call to bring insights from social science into the discussion of fishers and fishing (see Urquhart *et al.* 2011), research has begun to explore a range of issues associated with the [dis]continuance of the fishing industry, especially from the perspectives of younger fishers. This research has explored the ways that younger fishers might gain ‘hands on’ experience of the fishing industry in conjunction with older, often male<sup>2</sup>, relatives as part of a broader succession process (King 2005; Johnsen *et al.* 2004; Murray *et al.* 2006; Power *et al.* 2014; Blomquist *et al.*, 2016), how the fishing household and wider community might contribute to such processes of socialisation (Power *et al.* 2014; White 2015; Williams 2008) and how this process is as much about learning and acquiring the cultural codes of fishing as it is about acquiring technical knowledge (van Ginkel 2001).

Whilst these processes of socialisation and succession in the fishing industry have historically been common, recent research has asked, albeit tentative, questions around a possible rupture to such patterns. As White (2015, p.11) has recently observed in the pages of *Sociologia Ruralis*: “the widely held view that docile reproduction in small-scale

fisheries relies heavily on the processes of succession and inheritance occurring within a largely closed network of fishing families is beginning to lose its relevance”. For example, several scholars have pointed to the potentially prohibitive costs of entering the fishing industry that have resulted from the introduction of quotas and the attendant fishing licences (van Ginkel 2014; Neis *et al.* 2013; Power 2012). Alongside this, some scholars have suggested that there are reduced opportunities for the fishing employment which had historically been a method of ‘learning the ropes of fishing’ (White 2015). Others have considered the wider demographics of fishing, with Symes and Frangoudes (2001) noting the importance of partners, particularly fishers’ wives, in reshaping traditional cultural expectations relating to issues of work-life balance and familial succession (see also Coulthard and Britton 2015; Power 2012; Sønvisen 2013), as well as how younger people’s integration within wider coastal communities may (re)shape how they perceive the occupation of fishing and the other career and lifestyle opportunities open to them (Power 2012; Sønvisen 2013).

Although there are clearly questions around the potentially changing nature of familial succession and inheritance in fisheries, van Ginkel (2014 p.16) notes the continued significance of such arrangements, suggesting that the fishing way of life may encompass more than economic issues and, indeed, notes the potential resilience of family fishing enterprises as they might offer “adaptability not usually found in company-owned firms that operate under the capitalist mode of production”. Important, here, is a recognition that being a fisher incorporates more than simply economic imperatives. Implicit too within this research is that being a fisher, particularly within these familial contexts, is about more than just the individual fisher –with occupational decisions often framed in relation to others around them. The following paper seeks to forward this understanding

of fishing lives by adopting a lifecourse perspective. Taking its cue from the wider turn to lifecourse approaches within the social sciences, the paper seeks to move beyond a consideration of individual lives and life events as discrete entities, towards recognising how these lives are interrelated and unfold in parallel and in geographically specific ways (Hopkins and Pain 2007). Drawing on in depth qualitative research on the Llŷn peninsula in Wales (UK), the paper combines this lifecourse perspective with recent Bourdieusian-inspired considerations on how fishers accumulate capital(s) in negotiating their socially-acceptable position of ‘good fisher’ (Gustavsson *et al.* 2017). Following an outline of this conceptual framing and a discussion of the methodological approach taken, the paper uses the metaphor of the ‘fishing ladder’ to examine the way that fishing lives unfold and overlap across the lifecourse.

### **Conceptualising the fishing lifecourse**

In seeking a fuller understanding of the lives of fishers and the [dis]continuity of small-scale fishing, the paper brings together a lifecourse perspective with Bourdieusian ideas of capital, habitus and field. Although there has been a growing presence of lifecourse studies in the wider social sciences in recent years (Hopkins and Pain 2007), such perspectives have remained under-utilised in the discussion of fishers and fishing. Our lifecourse framing draws on both of those more longstanding notions put forward by Elder (1994) as well as the more recent refinements within the geographical literature(s). Although the lifecourse perspective is a multifaceted approach to understanding the social trajectories of lives, it is underpinned by four key aspects. The first – ‘the interplay of human lives and historical times’ – takes into account how individuals born in different years are exposed to different historical worlds which present them with specific options as well as constraints (Elder 1994 p.5). The second aspect, ‘the timing of lives’, refers to

the social meaning and ‘age norms’ attached to particular life stages as well as the timings of specific transitions –such as between childhood to adulthood, leaving the parental home and retirement. Lifecourse scholars seek to examine the social norms around the ‘appropriate age’, which are bound up in a particular context of time and place. The third pillar of the lifecourse approach, ‘linked lives’, represents the notion of ‘interdependent lives’ –that is, the observation that human lives are embedded in intergenerational social relationships. Elder (1994) further suggests that the term ‘linked lives’ refers to the interactions between an individual’s social worlds over the life span, that can lead to patterns reproducing themselves across generations. The fourth characteristic of the lifecourse approach is the recognition of ‘human agency’ which emphasises how individuals make choices within the constraints of their worlds.

Although its origins are in demography (see Elder *et al.* 2003) geographers have recently sought to develop the lifecourse perspective –seeking in particular to move away from a ‘fixed’ understanding of the lifecourse, as defined by a limited number of events in individual’s biographies, to exploring the ‘fluidity’, ‘relationality’ and spatiality of lifecourse transitions, trajectories and pathways (Bailey 2009). In particular, geographers have explored the various ways that lifecourses may be situated in particular spatial contexts (Hopkins and Pain 2007). Areas of concern within this more geographically–inflected approach have included transitions such as those into adulthood (Valentine 2003), older age and grandparenthood (Tarrant 2010; Riley 2011) and into retirement (Riley 2012). In assessing the potential areas for further development, Hopkins and Pain (2007) stress the need to move toward a more holistic consideration of the lifecourse – from younger to older age –something taken forward in explorations of the processes of migration and the changing meaning of place over the lifecourse for Irish emigrants (Ni

Laoire 2001) and homosexual men (Lewis 2014). Alongside this, geographers have noted the need to examine the importance of intergenerational links and how particular spatial contexts have significance for the lifecourse of different individuals (Hopkins and Pain 2007; Vanderbeck 2007). For example, there is now an abundant literature which suggests that children's identities are produced in interactions with individuals of older age from other generational groups (Hopkins and Pain 2007).

Particular life phases have been studied within fishing, with studies of young people and a considerations of how they 'get into fishing' being most numerous (Miller and van Maanen 1982; Sønvisen 2013; White 2015). Research in this field has highlighted the increased economic costs involved in becoming a fisher (van Ginkel 2014; Neis *et al.* 2013; Power 2012) and how processes of learning have changed over time with a changing fishing occupation and society (Johnsen *et al.* 2004; Murray *et al.* 2006; Ota and Just 2008; Power *et al.* 2014). To date, however, there are few discernable efforts within this literature, particularly in the global north, to frame these within a wider lifecourse perspective.<sup>3</sup> Although Symes and Frangoudes (2001) rightly caution that direct comparison between agriculture and fishing is limited due the quite distinct structural differences in ownership and intergenerational transfer of property, the contextually-sensitive analysis of farming lifecourses arguably has much conceptual impetus to offer the discussion of fishers. Here, researchers have highlighted the intricate connections between different farming generations as children are socialised into a farming 'way of life' (Riley 2009a; Riley 2012) and how this may be gendered, with different cultural expectations on appropriate behavior for sons, daughters and daughter-in-laws (Cassidy and McGrath 2014; Pini 2007; Riley 2009b). The centrality of 'keeping the name on the land' in these contexts has stressed the importance of multi-lifecourse

and intergenerational decision-making and identity production, with later-life transitions seen to be framed in relation to younger generations, especially those positioned as successors to the farming occupation (Riley 2016; Riley and Sangster 2017). In addition to echoing Elder (1994)'s call to recognise the wider social and temporal contexts in which lifecourses unfold, often in tandem, this recent geographical work highlights the importance too of the specific geographical contexts in which these unfoldings take place.

An important aspect of the lifecourse approach is how it “relates individuals to broader social context” (Elder 1994, p.6). It is here that we synthesise a lifecourse perspective with Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the social world as a “two-way relationship between objective structures (those of social fields) and incorporated structures (those of the habitus)” (Bourdieu 1998, p.vii) which have recently been taken forward in studies on fisheries in the development of the concept of the ‘good fisher’ (Gustavsson *et al.* 2017). Bourdieu's (1998 p.81) notion of habitus, which he defines as the disposition to act within “a particular section of the world –a field –and which structures the perception of that world as well as action within that world”, is a fruitful lens for considering the field of fishing. Particularly important is that such a framing allows us to move beyond a myopic focus on economic capital to also incorporate other forms, most notably social and cultural capital (see Gustavsson *et al.* 2017). Drawing out from the longer-standing literature on the ‘good farmer’ (Burton 2004; Burton *et al.* 2008; Sutherland 2013; Sutherland and Burton 2011; Riley 2016), Gustavsson *et al.* (2017) have explored how the development of, and access to, different forms of capital shapes fishers' social standing as ‘good fishers’. Here, they noted that whilst cultural capital in its objectified form (ownership of boats, machinery and equipment) was important to fishers' status, equally important was embodied cultural capital –“in the form of long-standing



dispositions of the mind and body” (Bourdieu 1986, p.282) –and the ability to demonstrate the skills related to this. Such skills, Gustavsson *et al.* (2017) note, include the ability to work *with* the sea, especially tides and changing weather patterns. Given the less material nature of the sea, and the lack of direct observations of catch, markers such as the positioning of buoys become key proxies for this skill. Alongside this, Gustavsson *et al.* (2017) show that adhering to unwritten ‘rules of the game’ (after Bourdieu 1984) – such as respecting the territories of fellow fishers, respecting others’ fishing gear, maintaining collective safety at sea, and keeping secrets about potentially lucrative catches in the region –allows fishers to develop their social capital, which might give access to the help and equipment of others and more fundamental assurances such as increased safety at sea through the support of others.

Whilst notions of the good fisher offer a fruitful lens through which to recognise the previously under-represented, often more-than-economic, socio-cultural contexts in which fishers operate it has, to date, been somewhat temporally static, with little attention paid to how capitals are formed and (re)shaped over the lifecourse. If we return to Bourdieu’s original ideas from which those of the good fisher evolve, useful insight is offered in relation to familiar context, for example, and the lifecourse:

“initial accumulation of cultural capital [...] starts at the outset, without delay, without wasted time, only for the offspring of families endowed with strong cultural capital; in this case, the accumulation period covers the whole period of socialization”(Bourdieu 1986, p.284).

Important, therefore, for our framing here is a recognition that social as well as geographical contexts are important for how capital might be developed across the lifecourse and between different lives.

## Methodology

The paper is drawn from a wider study which sought to explore socio-cultural contexts of fishing lives on the Llŷn peninsula –a small-scale fishing region in north west Wales (UK). Although it is recognised that there is great diversity in fishing types and locality, small-scale enterprises are still seen as making up a significant percentage of the industry in Europe (Guyader *et al.* 2013) and the Llŷn peninsula offered a suitable locality to explore small-scale fishing. Alongside this, the area has recently been subject to an attempt to introduce Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ), which brought public opposition and was eventually scrapped, and whilst it is not the explicit focus of the current paper, this offered a useful discussion point with fishers through which to explore this potential challenge to their occupation. The Llŷn peninsula fishery is as a multi-species, multi-gear coastal fishery with lobster, scallops, crab, whelks and sea bass some of the main target species. The fishery is seasonal with a combination of both part-time and full-time fishers. In total 47 participants, linked to 16 fishing were interviewed in 2014/15 (the majority on more than one occasion) and included current fishers (F); sons; daughters; and partners of fishers (P) in fishing families –who ranged from 18 to 75 years old (although the majority were between 30 and 60).<sup>4</sup> Amongst those interviewed, all can be classified as lobster fishers who, to varying degrees, engage in targeting other types of fish and shellfish using other fishing gear. Full-time fishers had often employed alternative fishing methods and engaged in diversification of their fishing products to increase their profit margins. Part-time fishers deployed a different strategy to achieve the same financial outcome in that they often had second jobs in areas such as construction, tourism and farming or in the public sector. The fishers interviewed primarily spoke Welsh as a first language, but were interviewed in English.

To gain access to research participants, initial contact was made with two local fisheries committees, with members providing a first wave of respondents, and chain-referral sampling (Heckathorn 2002) used to locate subsequent waves. The qualitative and semi-structured interviews were used to gain an understanding of fisher's activities, identities, knowledge and life histories. The locations of interviews were chosen by the participants –most commonly conducted in their homes and/or in close proximity to the fishing cove, which made it possible to fit in the interview around the fishing family members' busy schedules. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was read through several times and coded manually following the framework set out by Reismann (2008). Several themes were identified using this narrative thematic coding and are discussed in the following sections.

### **Getting on the fishing ladder –the importance of context**

Within previous studies of fishing it has been revealed that learning to fish is not only about learning the techniques of fishing as it is also important to generally embody an understanding of the fishing culture (van Ginkel 2001) –or what in Bourdieusian terms might be seen as 'rules of the game'. Initial interview questions focused on early experiences of fishing and entering the fishing industry:

“[How have I] learnt to fish? I don't know. You just do it really. You know there is a saying in Welsh [speaking Welsh] 'Salt in the blood'. If you know what I mean?! We have been doing it all our life you know. We have been going with dad since we were small”(F-28).

“People say that the sea is in your blood. I don’t know if I believe that or not. Well I don’t in fact. I think it is just the way I got brought up, and my dad got brought up. Obsessed about fishing since [we were] young”(F-4).

“A lot of people go into [fishing] through starting helping people onshore or on the boat. You might just get a few days’ work here and there but then you get an interest and [an] insight into the job and then decide if you like it or not”(F-10).

The reference to ‘salt in the blood’ is arguably an articulation of the fishing ‘habitus’ (see Bourdieu 1998). Whilst the reference to ‘blood’ infers a type of genetic inheritance, each of the three responses point to their specific social and cultural contexts which shape both the level of expectation and opportunity available to them. For fishers 28 and 4, this is closely linked to their familial contexts, whilst for fisher 10, it is noted that non-familial fishing contexts may shape their experiences. The interviews went on to reveal that what was important here was how these different contexts afforded different possibilities for the accumulation of capital –and hence the position as a ‘good fisher’ –and how these might change and develop as the lifecourse unfolds. All of those interviewed referred to the economic costs of entering the industry, with the partner of a fisher highlighting: “You have got [to have] your boat and your license and all your pots and things... and then [you need to] get your bait. It is quite an expensive thing –to set up” (P-4). Whilst on one level these financial considerations (or barriers) are important to getting on the fishing ladder, the interviews with fishers highlighted the importance of accumulating other forms of capital:

“It is very rare now that you get young people going into the industry. Which is probably gonna be a problem in the future. Because [when you start young you have got a few pots and you build your gear up and you learn all the way...] You learn from your mistakes and it is a steep and costly learning curve[...] I learned from my father and his family... [On the

other hand] if you sort of decided: ‘Oh I want to be a fisherman’... We have seen it happen so often here. They invest a lot of money and it is not [...] half as simple as people think. It is very difficult to make a living”(F-10).

“Well you have to start young [and be local to the area]. You can’t just, well you can, there is nothing stopping you jumping into a boat fishing but I would imagine other people having comments and quarrelling. [...] I know the Llŷn peninsula is a very small area but it is, as I was saying, territorial. And you have to be part of that community and the area to be able to do it.[...] I learnt as a little boy really. Just going out with my parents[...], and you have to help. You[...] are not allowed to sit [and] do nothing.[...] Just progressed from there really”(F-19).

Within these responses, the intersection of family context and capital was seen to be important in three main ways: through inheriting or sharing equipment, through territories and in the development of fishing skills. The first of these is perhaps the most obvious – where those born into fishing families are able to take on the gear of their familial predecessors (most often their fathers) in order to get onto the fishing ladder. Fisher 10, however, reveals that one of the complexities of accessing the fishing industry is that economic capital alone may be insufficient. As fisher 22 argued in a similar vein “any fool can carry money to the sea [...] anyone can invest in a big boat, lots of lobster gear but you have got to return a profit”. That is, even when a fisher has sufficient economic capital to buy necessary equipment, the objectified cultural capital they represent is only turned into symbolic capital when the fisher is able to demonstrate the skill –or embodied cultural capital –to operate it. What such responses reveal is a deeper layer whereby the economic capital passed from, or shared with, parents is only part of this successful entry into the fishing occupation. Whilst fisher 19 notes that anyone can, in theory, get into a boat and start fishing, he follows this with reference to potential ‘comments’ or

‘quarrelling’ that this may invoke. This interview response, and the wider fieldwork, revealed that fishing territories are an important part of the social and spatial organisation of fishing:

“Every fisherman has their own patch. [...] It is not their patch obviously. It doesn’t belong to them but it is just respect. It depends on where you have always fished. Most fishermen, especially around here, it’s been handed down and it’s been handed down. You know generation to generation”(F-28).

Although the intricacies of fishing territories have been discussed elsewhere (see Gustavsson *et al.* 2017; Symes and Frangoudes 2001), two important points are raised from these observations from interviews. The first is that it is not only gear and economic capital that can be passed on, but also fishing territories. Second, and interrelated, was the importance, in this process, of what fishers might call “respect” (F-28) or what in Bourdieusian terms we might see as social capital. The linked lives of fishers and their predecessors becomes important here. Working alongside predecessors for a period, the interviews suggested, allowed younger fishers to learn the ‘rules of the game’ and to develop the skills (embodied cultural capital) which would allow them to be accepted, as their own social capital develops, by others fishers in the area –a central process in having access to particular fishing territories. The following extracts referred to how these dual aspects had worked in their cases:

“I used to do potting when I was a little kid. Just one or two pots. I used to haul them by hand”(F-8).

“Well there were three fishermen here when I started and [with] my father being a fisherman, [I was] just helping [the other fishermen my father knew] to begin with. Going out and having an interest as a very young boy. I was born and raised to it. I was part of it”(F-19).

“When I was [fishing] on my own, I lived [at home]... I didn’t have any bills really. So I could experiment more. [...] If I did have a bad day it didn’t really matter too much. Whereas if we have a terrible week [today] we still have got bills to pay”(F-27).

Within each of these responses we can see the interlinking of the presence of the economic capital of their predecessors and the development of the younger fishers own embodied cultural capital and eventual social capital. In each case, the presence of fishing equipment allowed a period of experimentation, where they could both learn and also demonstrate these skills. For fisher 27, as he got older the freedom to live cheaply at home was an important factor in allowing him to experiment and develop his fishing independence. Turning to Bourdieu, we can see how a family with this shared fishing habitus is central to this process:

“the length of time for which a given individual can prolong his [sic] acquisition process depends on the length of time for which his [sic] family can provide him [sic] with free time, i.e., time free from economic necessity, which is the precondition for the initial accumulation”(Bourdieu 1986, p.284).

In sharing the same fishing habitus, the fishing families of those such as fisher 27 recognise the symbolic importance the various types of capital may bring and thus the importance of their development. In this way, the space for experimentation that they provide may be seen as an important investment for the future. In addition to providing space for experimentation during the lifetime of predecessors, it was found that social capital may expand across generations. For those fishers taking on gear and territories from their familial predecessors, it was revealed that they were given ‘breathing space’ (after Burton 2012 in relation to farming), whereby their initial social standing in the fishing area was high, at least for a certain period, as a result of the pre-existing social capital of their predecessors. Here, any lack of embodied cultural capital was forgiven

and fishers had time to make the necessary adjustments and additions to their skills and knowledge.

Whilst the aforementioned suggests that there was a linearity, between father and son in particular, the interviews revealed that wider familial connections were also significant:

“[I used to go out fishing] with my father. But we also had my father’s cousin [who] fished. Friends of the family fished and they taught us. And then you learn from the people here. [...] [Another fisher’s father] taught us a lot of things and helped us. Cause my father was [older] and he used willow pots... but by the 1980s [fishermen] had moved to using [pots] with an iron frame.[...] My father wasn’t like too modern with these techniques... but we learnt off friends then. But it was through my father.[...] Without my father’s connection it would have been much more difficult”(F-22).

Alongside the earlier observation that social capital may be to some extent transferred between generations, examples such as those above suggest that cultural capital may change in relation to evolving technologies and that rather than a vertical transfer of knowledge, horizontal networks are also important.<sup>5</sup> Whilst this example shows how particular skills and knowledge that are transferred may become outdated, and require input from horizontal networks, the process of ‘cultural transmission’ (e.g. Vanderbeck 2007) between generations also brought forward knowledge that took on different capital value:

“It is knowledge of nature, the fishing condition, but it is also anthropology. You know the specific names where you are. Ehmm... the status of the tide, that is knowledge that is not written anywhere. It gets passed down. It is like that kind of thing. Lots unwritten and will never be. You just carry it in your head”(F-22).



“Cause I can name all the rocks and coves and everything from here all the way down to [fishing place X]. All features and everything, they have all been passed on to me”(F-10).

Such intricate knowledge of the sea was, interviews revealed, passed across, and accumulated over generations. Although, in the past, much of this knowledge had been important to orientating at sea, the majority of fishers spoken to now used electronic, GPS technologies (cf Murray *et al.* 2006). Far from being defunct, however, these stories from previous generations took on new importance. On the one hand, the stories contained understandings of sea safety, or patterns of good catching which had direct value to the current fishers. On the other hand, the stories had a performative importance –with their telling allowing a claim to the fishing lineage and heritage which enabled current fishers to enhance their social capital through the claim of long familial history in this area.

### **Non-familial access –‘raising the tiger’**

Although, as suggested, there were numerous and intricate ways in which the context of being born into a fishing family may ease the ascent onto the fishing ladder, the fieldwork revealed that routes onto this ladder were available to those without this familial context:

“I started hanging around the beach. I grew up amongst them all [...] and I started pestering the fishermen asking them if I could go out to sea with them.[...] One of them said ‘yeah come with me’ and then I went. And then I started talking to the others.[...] Just taking it all in like a 15 year sponge.[...] I used to listen and take note and I always remember[ed] how everything was done.[...] What I find now [is that] what I have learnt when I was really young [...] is coming back to me every day.[...] ‘How did he do it back then?’... You can’t phone him to ask because he might be dead...”(F-11).

For these fishers, growing up in these areas afforded them a looser fishing network, where social, rather than familial contacts paved the way into the fishing community. For them, showing commitment to getting involved “after school”, “after work” and “after college” (F-22) and at the same time “being noisy” and “pestering fishermen” (F-11) –that is, a more proactive role as opposed to the more passive routes that may be taken by fishing sons –allowed them to develop their own forms of formative social capital which gained them access to the more private, insider, spaces of fishing such as the boat. From here, they were able to demonstrate their enthusiasm and ‘sponge-like’ (F-15) qualities in developing embodied cultural capital which, over time, allowed them to develop social capital which gave them access, as fishing crew, to fishing vessels and eventually to fishing territories in their own right. Their position in the fishing lifecourse –being young –was central to this process of linking to the lives of older fishers. As fisher 16 recalled:

“[An older] guy said to me... ‘have you ever heard the phrase’... I will say it in English... ‘raising a tiger’. I said ‘what do you mean raising a tiger?’ He said ‘I feel I am raising a tiger, when they are little they are all cute and cuddly, but when they grow up they will eat you.’ That is a fair call... [Laughter]”(F-16).

What Elder (1994) refers to as the ‘social meaning of age’ is important here. Being young –or ‘cute and cuddly’ –positioned these fishers as unthreatening, and less likely to ‘eat you’. As such, the relative age positioning gave the younger men access to the “private transmission of knowledge” (Symes and Frangoudes 2001). This was seen to be in contrast to those later in the fishing lifecourse. As one fisher with his own boat explained:

“No they wouldn’t tell me certain things like that. They might have said 15 years ago, when I was a child and I didn’t have a boat. [...] I still ask but I won’t be told the same. When you are a child and when you ask questions they seem to take more... ‘Oh you have got to do

this, and you have got to do that', but when you are older and you ask them something they go around the question and don't give you the answer"(F-11).

Fisher 11's position later in the lifecourse and, in particular, owning his own boat, positioned him as a competitor –or tiger –and resulted in him being excluded from the secrets and knowledges that had been made available to sons of fishers. Rather than having access to, and benefits from, the capitals of established fishing predecessors as seen in the earlier examples, these older fishers relied on other capital arrangements. For fisher 16, for example, he entered the industry by "purchasing a boat from a retiring fisherman. [...] And he offered it to me for 700 in the first year and to pay him 700 afterwards in the second year". In such cases, it was pre-existing economic capital which allowed these younger fishers without familial connections to get onto the fishing ladder. This alone, however, did not guarantee their access to fishing territories or acceptance within the fishing community. This was achieved over a longer time period by displaying their good fishing abilities –namely their ability to skilfully land catch and, importantly, to adhere to the reciprocal agreement to remain trustworthy, especially keeping the secrets of catch levels around the Llŷn peninsula in order to keep those outsiders not local to the region away.

### **Climbing and staying on the ladder**

The metaphor of a fishing ladder implies a somewhat linear and uniform lifecourse trajectory –but as Valentine (2003 p.48) notes in the more general discussion of the lifecourse, such life transitions "may not be connected and may occur simultaneously, serially or not at all". For all fishers, the movement from being a deckhand (or part of a

crew) to becoming a skipper and/or boat owner involved the development of a broader set of skills:

“[As a skipper] we have to be welders, we have to be fishermen, you name it we have to do it.[...] Engineers. If the engine conks out you have to be able to repair it [...] it is all part of it. So you have to be a mechanic as well.[...] Navigation too.[...] You have to be everything –except a millionaire”(F-19).

Such responses illustrate that being in charge of a boat involves the development of embodied cultural capital to include not just the physical strength and fishing technique, but also technical and managerial skills too. The interviews, however, suggested that moving along the fishing ladder in small-scale fishing did not involve leaving behind those previously learnt skills, but instead involved performing these alongside new ones. Moreover, the social and familial contexts were again important here, with those fishers entering the occupation alongside familial predecessors able to learn these skills in a phased, cumulative way over time. As figure 1 depicts, these fishers are able to enter fishing with the social capital of their predecessors, and then work alongside these in develop particular skills and dispositions (cultural capital) before ascending to boat ownership and the associated economic capital that this may afford. For younger fishers taking the non-familial route, they have a more elongated entry where they have to prove their cultural competence (or skills) in order to gain acceptance, before eventually inheriting or being able to afford their own vessel. Finally, those older newcomers may come with economic capital –often from another, or part-time, occupation –but need to become attuned to the fishing habitus of this area and demonstrate their skills in order to gain social capital and acceptance into the community, which then allows them to continue generating income from fishing.

[Figure 1 somewhere here]

Important to understanding what has been termed the ‘mid-course’ (Moen and Fields 2002) among these fishers, and their progression through it, is a recognition of how wider life events, and other linked-lives, start to shape the fishing lifecourse. Touched upon in previous research (Coulthard and Britton 2015; Gerrard 2013), the research found that parenthood (re)shaped trajectories through fishing lifecourses:

“I have always fished since very young age. Full-time to begin with and, obviously, when we got a family and a mortgage and all the rest of the things that come with it, we kind of had to do other things as well just to make a living more than anything. You can make a living out of fishing. I am not saying you can’t, but it is a very hard living. So, that is why I do other things as well.[...] And once [the children] have grown [up] I will probably be a full-time fisherman again”(F-19).

“There was a point that I thought I liked to up[scale] the whole operation to stay out for four or five days at a time.[...] It would have involved a lot of investment and [...] time. But then I thought that is not really fair on anyone.[...] The family decision did make me say no, don’t do that, it is not really the right thing to do.[...] If I would have been on my own, I would have taken that decision I think. Stayed out there for as long as I could”(F-16).

“If I reduce my pot numbers [...] I wouldn’t make a living for myself and the family and pay my bills”(F-10).

The very practical issue of caring responsibilities brought about by having children was seen to be significant for the small-scale fishers, where the nature of their occupation meant that their partners often had to take on employment to supplement the household income. Fishers 19, 16 and 10 illustrate that having children may differently shape the speed and nature of progression along the fishing ladder over the lifecourse. For some,

such as fisher 16, increasing economic capital through investment was delayed as a result of having a family, whilst fisher 10 highlights that having a family becomes a reason for not being able to let the level of capital accumulation fall, with fisher 19 bringing an extension to this –noting how a family brings the need for a more secure and constant income derived from outside of fishing. In the same way that living life in tandem with parents allowed the younger fishers discussed earlier the freedom to experiment, the linked lives of their own children were important in directing and/or constraining the opportunities open to fishers later in the lifecourse.

### **Older age and stepping down the ladder**

In considering the latter part of the fishing lifecourse, the theme of retirement was something considered within interviews:

“The day will come when you can’t and that is it I should think. When you are ill or when your hips or your back goes too bad. Cause we lift pots full-time. You know we [fishers] get a lot of problems.[...] Back and hips. That is just fishing ain’t it?! [...] Age doesn’t matter at all.[...] As long as you can keep on doing it you carry on, that is it”(F-18).

Important here is the idea of age as relational (Hopkins and Pain 2007; Wyn and White 1997). As a largely self-employed occupation, fishing is not subject to the institutional age markers –such as retirement age –as seen in other occupations and, as such, “age doesn’t matter” (F-18). Instead, physical capabilities were reported to dictate when someone stops, or is “forced”(F-12) off the fishing ladder. As the wider lifecourse literature highlights, the spectre of occupational retirement can provide a significant identity challenge (Price 2000). Utilising a similar Bourdieusian framework, Riley (2016) noted how in agriculture older farmers were able to maintain their ‘good farmer’ status in

older age through remaining present on the farm - even where their overall contribution to farm work may be reduced. The fishers spoken to were working out of small fishing coves without access to ports. This meant that their ability to compensate for reduced bodily capability through the use of labour saving equipment or technology (such as tractors or quad bikes used in farming) was less. As such being forced into retirement could be an abrupt life event for fishers, rather than a gradual winding down process as seen in agriculture. Where bodily capabilities, albeit often reduced, did allow fishers to continue several approaches were evident:

“Now in the latter years, because he is over 65, [he doesn’t do] as many hours. Say he goes out at eight o’clock in the morning and could be back at two or three in the afternoon. But there were times he was going four or five o’clock in the morning and came back sometimes at five o’clock at night.[...] He doesn’t do as much but he is still doing too much”(P-21).

“One day will come when I can’t lift this amount of pots. But I want that day to be my decision. ‘Oh I am tired now I can’t do this many [pots] I’ve got to cut down’”(F-18).

“I was doing 40 [lobster pots] a day, all by hand. Yeah. It was heavy. But when I was 17, 18, 19 [years old] that was nothing, you just fly through them. Great fun”(F-16).

For fishers such as partner 21’s fishing husband, their approach to remaining on the fishing ladder was to remain active, but to be selective in how they do this. Their lifecourse position, and their past history within fishing, was seen to be central to this process. For fisher 18, it is the economic capital accumulated over time which allows him to be selective in how he engages with fishing. Here, he maintains the good fisher status, especially through his continued demonstration of fishing activity and associated skills, but his accumulated capital means he is able to choose the hours he works. Remaining ‘in place’ is important to this aspect. It is through being on board the fishing vessel, and being seen in fishing-related spaces, that fishers are able to maintain their status within their

fishing communities. Cutting across the interview excerpts above is the way that symbolic capital enables a (re)configuration of good fisher status in older age. Noted in interviews with many fishers, and articulated specifically in the quote of fisher 16, is reference to their past activities. At one level, this past work is linked to economic capital accumulated and the choice to ‘slow down’ that this may offer. At a second level, their demonstrations of good fisher abilities in earlier life become discursively utilised in older age as they (re)narrate them to other fishers to (re)affirm their good fisher status. Linking together this theme of remaining in place and discursively drawing out past activities and achievements was the process adopted by some fishers of continuing fishing as a hobby:

“But even if we had all the money in the world he wouldn’t stop fishing.[...] Okay, maybe not going out every day as he is now, [only] when the weather is okay. But he would never [stop fishing].[...] He has got [a] retirement boat,[...] so that he can pot around a few.[...] So he will never retire properly,[...] because he just loves being on the sea”(P-9).

Statements such as these have parallels to the case of farming, with Riley (2012) noting how farmers may stay busy during retirement by engaging in activities such as gardening. Such insights suggest that fishing as a hobby is a way to attempt a smooth transition from that of work to retirement as it facilitates “moral continuity: how to integrate existing beliefs and values about work into a new status that constitutes withdrawal from work” (Ekerdt 1986, p.243) as well as minimal need for reconfiguration of fishers’ identities.

Relating to the theme of linked lives, the presence of a fishing successor was central to the pathways taken and activities performed in older age:

“I am not completely ignorant but if it has got to be bought it has got to be bought hasn’t it? As long as he doesn’t want a new boat [Laugh]. Not at his age. That will become completely different”(P-21).



Partner: “[Our daughter] was going out with a fisherman [...] well, third generation fisherman isn’t he? Oh [you] were made up, [my husband] was like ‘oh it is going to be lovely’. [...] [But] it only lasted a couple of month. [Laughing].”

Fisher: “I thought it would be nice to sort of give it all to somebody, who are gonna use it sort of thing.[...] If none of my family or [...] partners of my family wanted to do it I would like to take somebody [on]... maybe as I get older.[...] There will come a point when I can’t physically do it and you could share the workload and maybe bring a [young person] into it. Maybe sell everything on to them...”(P-17 and F-16).

For the partner of fisher 21, the presence of a successor shaped the business decision of whether, or not, she and her husband would invest in a new boat, whilst fishers 16 and partner 17 note how retirement decisions in older age are intricately linked to these successors –not only in terms of passing on the various forms of capital, but in order that the opportunity, through co-working, is there for fishers to remain in fishing as they reach older age and reduced physical capabilities. Within the responses, and linking back to our earlier discussion of getting onto the fishing ladder, the extracts reveal a ranking of priorities for succession where the first option would be to pass on experiences and material possessions within the family (son or son-in-law), followed by “taking somebody on” (F-16) from the local coastal community –to pass on both material possessions and embodied knowledge. Such observations reveal the importance of linked lives to older age in fishing in several ways. First, it can facilitate a shared practical context in which fishers may remain busy and visible through sharing their work with successors. Second, and interrelated, it allows their own contribution to become indivisible from the wider collective and hence allows them to maintain an identity as a good fisher. Thirdly, such connections had a more practical relevance in relation to the engagement with activities such as v-notching schemes<sup>6</sup>. The fieldwork found that whilst younger fishers generally

supported and engaged in the programme for safeguarding the future lobster stocks, older fishers without successors did not participate in such voluntary conservation schemes to any great extent, as “it wouldn’t benefit them” (F-8). However, engagement increased when a successor *was* present:

“I do it because of [my son].[...] If I was fishing by myself maybe it wouldn’t be worth throwing them back because I wouldn’t benefit. I would be retired in ten years’ time probably. So the older men usually keep [the berried lobsters] you see”(F-8).

Such examples are relevant to our wider understandings of fisheries management, illustrating how management actions are more than just present-cantered decisions and need to be considered across longer generational and time horizons.

## **Conclusions**

This paper, drawing out a lifecourse perspective, has considered how fishers may accrue, develop and use capital over the fishing lifecourse. This approach has allowed us to illustrate how those within different parts of the fishing field have access to different forms of capital, which in turn shapes how they are able to access the fishing ladder and position within the fishing community. As previous research has intimated, familial succession is particularly important within small-scale fisheries and this paper has unpacked this issue further. Whilst inheriting or sharing economic capital with predecessors, either in the form of boats or fishing gear, is a crucial way that fishers may access the fishing ladder, the paper has shown that the backdrop of familial context and support is important in subtler, but equally crucial, ways. Accessing and maintaining fishing territories relies on social position –or ‘good fisher’ status –within particular localities (Gustavsson *et al.* 2017) and the paper has seen how fishing families facilitate

this through providing social capital on which new entrants may draw and share as they become fishers, as well as providing space and time for them to experiment and develop their own embodied cultural capital.

The lifecourse perspective taken here, in paying attention to linked lives, sees how accessing and moving along the fishing ladder is closely choreographed with the lifecourse(s) of other fishers. Whilst previous research has focused on the potential advantages of this relationship for younger fishers, the paper has seen that older fishers too may benefit –using it to remain in fishing, sometimes modifying the extent of their direct involvement, and allowing them to maintain their occupational identity into later life. Such insights are relevant for the wider study of fishers. Specifically, it highlights the need to shift the scale of focus –both in policy and academic research –away from a singular concern for the individual fisher. Policies that seek to change or regulate fishers’ activities too need to recognise that decisions are often collective and spanning across several generations.

The paper has seen that whilst familial connection offers the most clearly defined route onto the fishing ladder, this is not the only pathway. Capital may be accumulated in different ways, and at different points across the lifecourse, to allow non-familial access. First, through ‘hanging around’ as youngsters, potential fishers may get invited into the private space of the boat and, once there, develop their social and cultural capital, with their relative age and geographical location being important precursors to this. Second, fishers may accumulate economic capital prior to becoming a fisher and then, later in the lifecourse, use this to develop their good fisher status in order to gain the support and acceptance of other fishers. Taken together, such examples illustrate the paper’s wider

finding that fishing lifecourses are not necessarily linear or uniform. Different points of entry may be taken onto the fishing ladder at different stages in the lifecourse. So too movement along the ladder may progress at different rates, with life transitions such as parenthood differentially shaping fishing activity and the ways that fishers accrue social capital. The recognition that decisions by fishers are made in the context of linked and unfolding lifecourses has relevance, beyond our specific study here, to recent attempts to introduce more sustainable fishing practices. Neis *et al.* (2013) have suggested that most fishing policies have been ‘inter-generationally blind’ and our observations show that fishers’ willingness to engage with practices such as v-notching is closely dependent on the presence of a fishing successor.

The findings presented in this paper open up avenues for future research. The paper has focused predominantly on the lifecourses of boys and men and there is a clear need for more research on women in fishing generally, and from a lifecourse perspective specifically. More work is needed to better understand women’s opportunities to accumulate symbolic capital (that is social and cultural capital) within the fishing field and how these processes change through the lifecourse. Our research has focused on the reflections of fishers and the perspectives of parents to consider their experiences of socialisation within the industry. Future research could usefully work with children themselves to examine their experiences of this process. Allied to these agendas, future work might examine whether geographical and social contexts different to those considered here differently (re)shape these processes. For example, we call for more lifecourse research on fisheries with different policy contexts – such as quota dependent fisheries, different scales of fishing enterprise and in light of ongoing demographic and societal changes. Alongside this, fishing governance is rapidly evolving in light of issues

such as climate change. It is possible that the more experiential understandings, or forms of capital, that we have examined here may become outmoded in light of a changing climate (and associated governance changes). Future longitudinal research might examine whether fishers are able to trace the changes in the marine environment already seen and predicted in the future and whether notions of good fishing become updated accordingly. Further examination is needed of how a successful dialogue may be developed between fishers and policy-makers to share understandings and, where appropriate, more formal systems of (co)education developed.

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## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Whilst there is a lack of standard definition on what constitutes ‘small-scale’ fishing, boat size and engine power, type of gear and capital and labour inputs are taken as more structural indicators, whilst other commentators point to the specific livelihood and diversification strategies that they may employ (see Salmi 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Although there are myriad ways in which women make contributions to fisheries in many geographical localities (see for example Zhao *et al.* 2013) the literature on socialisation and fisheries succession remain largely focused on young men (with Porter 1991 being an important exception).

<sup>3</sup> Hapke and Ayyankaril (2004) has previously deployed a lifecourse perspective in exploring gender ideologies amongst fish traders in a southern Indian fishing context. Whilst they, like Elder (1994), use the

term 'life course' we employ 'lifecourse' as used in the more recent geographical writings on the term (e.g. Hopkins and Pain (2007)).

<sup>4</sup> Whilst the fieldwork observed the multifarious contributions of women to the fishing industry, it was found that the actual practice of fishing was still dominated by men and hence they provide the primary focus of the ensuing analysis.

<sup>5</sup> Our interviews focussed primarily on the intergenerational transfer of these more technical knowledges. Future work might usefully consider how fishers engage with (or not) more formal, institutional sites of learning and how new technologies become understood and adopted more broadly.

<sup>6</sup> Fishers can voluntarily 'v-notch' berried lobsters (female lobsters with eggs). In practice, this means that they make a v-shaped cut in the lobster tail which indicates that the lobster has been caught and released. Fishers who might re-catch v-notched lobsters are not allowed to land or sell them (Welsh Government 2016). This conservation scheme was used to ensure the future vitality of the local lobster stock as the eggs which the female lobster carried would hatch into and ensure future breeding stock (see also Acheson and Gardner 2011).

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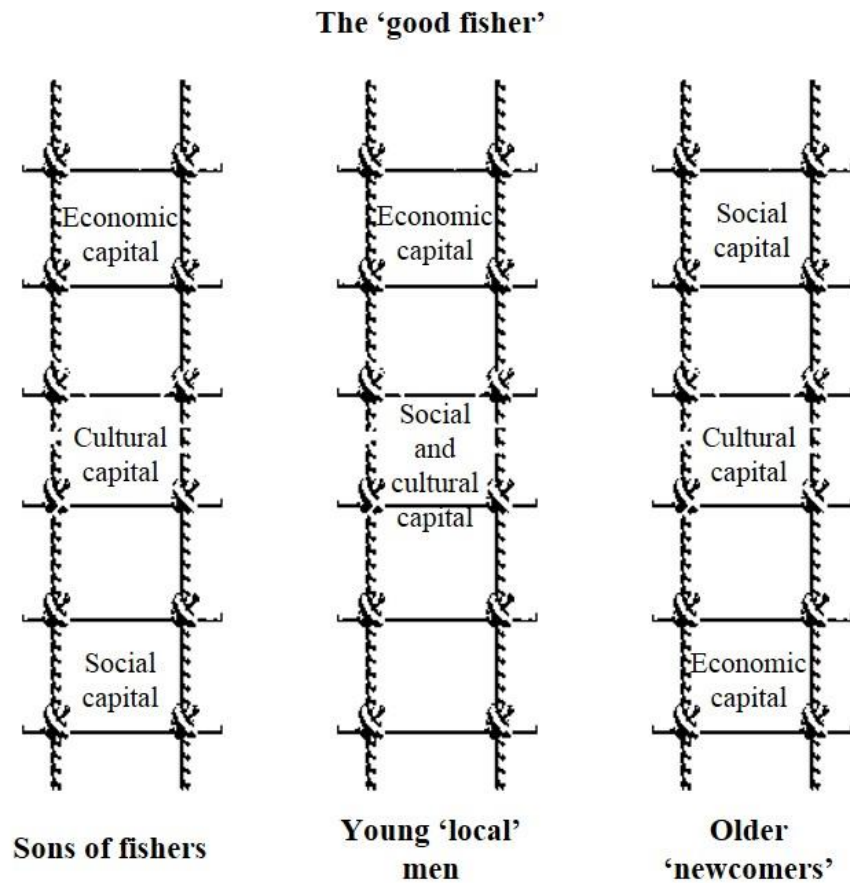


Figure 1: *The different trajectories in which prospective fishers, from different initial positions, accumulate fishing capital to become 'good fishers'*